

Grammar Study and Writing

"There is about the same relationship existing between grammar and composition as exists between any totally different subjects, (such) as grammar and geography." - Franklin Hoyt, **Teachers College Record**, 7, November 1906.

"In view of the widespread agreement of research studies based upon many types of students and teachers, the conclusion can be stated in strong and unqualified terms: the teaching of grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in actual composition, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing." - Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowell Schoer, **Research in Written Composition**, NCTE, 1963.

"Rarely does one find studies pointing so consistently in one direction... The research is of sufficient quality to warrant the conclusion that instruction in formal grammar is an ineffective and inefficient way to help students achieve proficiency in writing." Stephen Sherwin, **Four Problems in Teaching English: A Critique of Research**, NCTE, 1969.

"The main purpose of this investigation was to determine the direct effects of a study of transformational grammar on the language growth of secondary school pupils. The results presented show that the effects of such grammar study as negligible. Similarly, those pupils who studied a course containing elements of traditional grammar showed no measurable benefits. The R/W (Reading/Writing) group, who studied no formal grammar for three years, demonstrated competence in writing and related language skills fully equal to that shown by the two grammar groups. After two years, no difference was detected in writing performance or language competence; after three years, some small differences appeared in some minor conventions of usage favoring the TG (transformational grammar) group, but these were more than offset by the less positive attitudes which they showed towards their English studies. No differences were found in the School Certificate English results of the three groups, nor in a follow-up exercise twelve months later. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that English grammar, whether traditional or transformational, has virtually no influence on the language growth of typical secondary school students." W. B. Elley, I.H. Barham, H. Lamb, M. Wyllie, *The Role of Grammar in Secondary School Curriculum*, **Research in the Teaching of English**, 10, 1976.

Grammatical concepts that have impact on writing:

The participle: Participles are verb forms. They are usually expressed as *past participles* (disturbed, thrown, sung etc.) or *present participles* (dancing, reading, participating etc.). A participle is often supported by additional words built around it and adding details to it. Together the participle and the additional words form a *participial phrase*. Usually these added words directly follow the participle, but they may precede it. Adding concrete details to participles make your writing more vivid and informative.

Example: **Plagued by doubts about her ability**, Helen kept quiet in class, **answering questions only when the teacher called on her**.

Participles serve a number of functions in narrative, descriptive and explanatory writing. Besides making sentences more detailed and informative, participles also help create coherence, to give a sense of simultaneous action, and to indicate that one action is the cause of another.

The appositive: Appositives clarify and expand the meanings of nouns by supplying details about them. They do so within the same clause, not as separate sentences or clauses. In other words, appositives help cut down the number of clauses and at the same time make the remaining clauses fuller, more substantial and more compact.

Example: Dr. Hunt, **my favourite professor**, is the author of several books.

The absolute: An absolute is a group of words that is almost but not quite a full sentence. An absolute has a full subject but only part of a predicate, often only a participial phrase.

Example: Marie sat quietly at her desk, **her head tilted at a slight angle to the left, her hands clasped behind her neck, and her feet tapping the floor gently**.

Absolutes are especially appropriate when you shift from a description of the whole to a description of its parts, when you move from a general statement about Marie to specific details about her – her head, her hands, her feet.

Adjectives shifted out of order:

Example: His old, brown and moth-eaten sweater hung lifelessly on the newel post.

His old sweater, **brown and moth-eaten**, hung lifelessly on the newel post.

Action verbs:

Example: The old man walked down the street.

The old man **shuffled** down the street.